Charity No: 1154685

HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2020

HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE
CHARITY No: 1154685

BUSINESS INFORMATION

Independent Examiner	Price Bailey LLP Tennyson House Cambridge Business Park Cambridge CB4 0WZ
Business address	Central Library Cross Street The High Harlow Essex CM20 1HA
Trustees	Leslie Coben (resigned – November 2019) Michael Granger Margaret Barrett Martin Macey Shaun Graham Jean Juniper, Chair
Bankers	Harlowsave Credit Union Ltd Central Library Cross Street Harlow Essex CM20 1HA

HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE
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HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE
CHARITY No: 1154685

TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT

The committee present their report and financial statements for the year ending 31st March 2020. The committee act as trustees for Harlow & West Essex Law Centre and are referred to as such throughout this report. The report contains a level of detail consistent with the size of the charity. As funding and activities grow future reports will contain more detailed information.

Structure, governance, and management

Harlow & West Essex Law Centre (working name Harlow Advice Centre) is a charitable incorporated organisation. The charity is governed by a constitution. It was established in November 2013. The objects are the relief of poverty, suffering and distress and the advancement of education among the inhabitants of the Eastern Region and Harlow by the provision of legal advice, information, and assistance.

During the period, the following trustees have been involved in the management of the organisation:

Trustees: Leslie Coben (resigned – November 2019)
Jean Juniper (chair)
Michael Granger
Margaret Barrett
Martin Macey
Shaun Graham

The trustees were selected following meetings set up for this purpose. They are drawn from a variety of backgrounds and have many years of experience of the advice and other relevant sectors. As local residents involved in a wide range of community organisations, they have an in-depth understanding of the needs of the communities served.

The constitution is the foundation model recommended by the Charity Commission. All trustees have a copy of the constitution. The day-to-day management of the service rests with the Head of Service, Sue Jones.

Principal activities and business review

Harlow Advice Centre provides specialist level advice, advocacy and representation on benefits, housing, and debt plus assisted information on a wide range of related subjects. The service is free, confidential, and independent.

The Centre is a member of Advice UK, the national body which represents and supports the independent advice sector. The Advice Centre holds the Specialist Quality Mark (SQM). This is the quality assurance standard for specialist level legal advice services. The Solicitors Regulation Authority regulates its solicitor. The service is also regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

The service employs six qualified and experienced members of staff including a full-time housing solicitor. All members of the advice team have extensive local knowledge and long experience of working in the advice and legal sector. The team includes an adviser who is an approved intermediary for Debt Relief Orders.

The service is provided from self-contained offices with adjoining interview rooms on the first floor of Harlow Central Library. There is a lift for clients who cannot manage the stairs and a small waiting area.

TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT (continued)

During the period under review **the service dealt with 476 enquiries** and **worked on 368 complex cases**. The number of enquiries in March 2020 were significantly lower than normal for that time of year owing to the impact of Covid-19 and the national lockdown. **234 new cases were opened** during the year. The rest were cases that were opened before 1st April 2019 which continued to require casework during the period under review.

Cases closed between 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2020, where a monetary outcome could be recorded, gained a total of **£547,338 for clients**. This is an under-estimate as final financial outcomes are not always reported to the service. The financial gains achieved as a result of the **476** advice enquiries are not included in this figure. **Many cases had positive non-monetary outcomes** for clients including better management of debt and the prevention of homelessness.

Cases often take several appointments and, in some cases, well over a year to resolve. The long timescale is often related to waiting times for appeal hearing dates. The money brought into Harlow because of Harlow Advice Centre's work helps to create a strong local economy, as well as improving the quality of life for those directly involved. Most of Harlow Advice Centre's clients are on very low incomes. Research by the New Economics Foundation & Countryside Agency* has demonstrated that people on low income spend additional income locally - this has a multiplier effect which helps the local economy.

* Sacks, J. (2002) The Money Trail: Measuring your impact on the local economy using LM3, New Economics Foundation & the Countryside Agency, London. See benefit take-up etc.

Three examples of the specialist casework undertaken during the year under review are set out below.

Ms A came to the Advice Centre because she was struggling financially. Our welfare benefits adviser checked Ms A's universal credit account and found that she was only being paid for one of her two children. The child not being paid for is severely disabled, so Ms A was also not being paid a child disability element. This meant that she was receiving over £600 a month less than she should have been and this had been going on since the start of her claim, which was a year earlier. Ms A had declared both her children when she made her claim. The claim also asks if any of the children are being looked after by the Local Authority. Because Ms A's son had a social worker, she ticked yes to this question. Consequently, universal credit assumed her son was in residential care and did not pay for him.

Our benefits adviser re-declared both children on the UC account and asked that both missing elements be paid from the start of the claim. Universal credit started to pay the missing elements but refused to pay from the start of the claim stating that there had been a late reporting of the fact that she had two children.

Our advisor requested a mandatory reconsideration of this decision, which was unsuccessful. She then lodged an appeal. She argued that Ms A had declared both children and her son's disability in her claim, so this was not reported late. The fact that UC had failed to assess the claim correctly was an official error. The Appeals Section at the Department for Work & Pensions agreed with our adviser and found in Ms A's favour.

In addition to a monthly increase in income of just over £600, when the matter was eventually sorted out, Ms A was paid over £9,000 in arrears.

Ms B was struggling to make ends meet. She approached the Advice Centre for assistance with various debts. Ms B is a middle-aged single person receiving universal credit, personal independence payment and council tax support. She lives alone, suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, and various other health problems.

Our Debt Adviser discussed various options for dealing with her debts which totalled £14,000 of non-priority debts. This included a County Court Judgement for a parking penalty charge which had been sent to bailiffs to collect. She also had two council tax debts, also with bailiffs.

After discussing the full range of potential debt solutions, including affordable monthly payments with a request to freeze interest and charges, bankruptcy, and a debt relief order (DRO), it was agreed that a DRO was the most appropriate solution. Ms B could not raise the £680 fee for bankruptcy, nor was it the best option for other reasons. With a disposable Income of just £5 per month it would take many years to pay her debts by instalments, even if her creditors agreed to write some of it off. Our Debt Advisor is an approved intermediary for debt relief orders. He applied for a DRO and it was granted. Ms B's debts were frozen for a year, then written off.

Ms B can now look forward to a life free of the stress caused by her indebtedness.

Ms C is a single parent with two young sons, they both have behavioural problems which are linked to their ADHD. Ms C herself has some long-standing mental health issues.

She had made an application as homeless to a local authority, and they had accepted a duty to her and her boys. She had been offered permanent accommodation and had refused it, as she felt it was unsafe for her sons due to their disability. In fact, the notes, when received, showed that she said she could not accept it, as it would not be safe for her sons, and she would rather hang herself than accept a property that was not safe for them. The local authority did not accept this and decided under Housing Act 1996, section 184 that she had refused an offer of suitable accommodation and therefore they had discharged their duty.

She asked for a review of this decision, this is an internal review, under section 202 of the 1996 Act. In this case the authority agreed that she could remain in her accommodation while the review was being carried out. In addition, she had provided medical evidence to the local authority and told them that she had an appointment with a psychiatrist. She asked for extra time to allow her to obtain a letter from the psychiatrist, but the local authority refused. They made their decision upholding the original decision and told her once again to leave the temporary accommodation.

At this stage she came to the Advice Centre for assistance. Our housing solicitor considered the papers and advised that there were grounds for appeal under Housing Act 1996, section 204.

She obtained the housing file to consider it – at this stage you cannot add extra evidence, the appeal is simply to look at whether the decision which was made at section 202 was reasonable given the information available to the council. She also asked the council to continue to accommodate Ms C and her sons whilst the appeal was outstanding, they agreed to do this.

On reading the file, it was clear that there were several procedural irregularities in this case, the same officer was involved in making the initial decision and the decision on review, the decision failed to look at the difficulties encountered by a woman who has mental health issues when looking after disabled children – this meant that the public sector equality duty found in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 had not been properly considered.

She instructed a barrister to provide the grounds and a skeleton argument and filed the section 204 appeal at court. There was some discussion with the council, but ultimately, they accepted that the decision was flawed and agreed to offer Ms C alternative accommodation. It took six months for our solicitor to bring this matter to a successful conclusion. This was after Ms C had spent many weeks trying to resolve the matter herself.

Financial review
During the period of account, the Charity received funds from the National Lottery Community Fund, Tudor Trust, Big Issue Invest, Legal Aid Agency, Islington Law Centre and others totalling £198,215. Most of the costs involved in running the service are related to wages, subscriptions, and general office expenses. The total receipts figure for the period ended 31 March 2020 of £198,215 does not include the £9,283 carried over from the previous year.

In the year under review the committee welcomed the Tudor Trust's decision to award £150,000 in grant aid to be spent over two to three years, and the National Lottery Community Fund decision to award a further continuation grant of £327,669 to be spent over three years ending November 2022.

The Trustees have paid particular attention to the Charity's position as a going concern in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Charity has secured continued funding which will last for a period in excess of one year. As such, and having considered the level of free reserves against future plans and fixed costs, the Trustees consider this to be sufficient for at least the next 12 months and do not have any concerns regarding the Charity's ability to meet its liabilities as they fall due.

Balances as at 31 March 2020 are as follows:

	£
Harlowsave Credit Union Account	£33,076
Petty Cash and Prepaid Card	£ 194
Total	£33,270

Risk management
The committee assessed the major risks when the charity was set up and reviewed the position in business planning meetings. Risk management was kept under review during the period covered by these accounts.

TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT (continued)

Reserves policy

The committee reviewed current and potential liabilities and determined that the reserves policy should cover unavoidable costs and legal obligations only. Premises costs are small and do not require payments beyond a short notice period. The deficit set out in the funds analysis relates to legal aid. The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) has strict rules concerning how much it will pay for legal aid work. The Big Issue Invest loan was provided to cashflow the legal aid work because it takes time to close cases and receive payment. The length of time between the start and end of legal aid cases is often many months and sometimes well over a year. The legal aid contract started in late 2018. More legal aid payments and financial settlements associated with this work started to flow in from April 2020.

The charity has secured additional capital and revenue funding since 31st March 2020, including substantial funds for new IT, office furniture and equipment. The value of fixed assets is therefore substantially higher than the figure as at 31st March 2020. Given the above, and the extensive insurance cover taken out by the charity, the committee is satisfied that the small reserve set out is sufficient to meet current and potential liabilities. The reserves policy will be kept under review.

Public benefit

The Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit has been considered when reviewing Harlow Advice Centre's aims and objectives and planning future activities. The committee has considered how planned activities contribute to the aims and objectives.

Acknowledgements and thanks

The committee and employees of the charity acknowledge with gratitude the contribution of many individuals, agencies, and organisations. These include:

Funders - National Lottery Community Fund, Tudor Trust, Big Issue Invest, Legal Aid Agency.

Others - Harlowsave Credit Union, Harlow Health Centres Trust, Islington Law Centre, Advice UK, Steve Johnson, Law Centres Network, Noeleen Adams, Legal Aid Agency, Pat Ruder, Friends of HWRA (particular thanks to office holders Cliff Moore, Jim Rogers, Alan Jones, David Foreman and chief fundraisers Judy Chan and Howard Chan), Harlow Trades Union Council, Essex County Council, Harlow Central Library, Harlow Foodbank, Price Bailey, Rainbow Services, Dennis Nadin, Fiona Langridge, Mary Hanbury, David Anderson, Everlevel, Luna Logistics, Ian Hudson, Harlow and District Chamber of Commerce.

The committee apologises in advance for any names omitted in error. Organisations rather than individuals have been listed where appropriate.

Jean Juniper
Jean Juniper
Jean Juniper (Jan 28, 2021, 4:33pm)

Chair

On behalf of the Committee
Dated:

28 Jan 2021

INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE

I report to the charity trustees on my examination of the accounts of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2020 which are set out on pages 7 to 10.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity's trustees you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act').

I report in respect of my examination of the charity's accounts carried out under section 145 of the Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the charity as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.



Michael Cooper-Davis FCCA ACA
for and on behalf of
Price Bailey LLP
Chartered Accountants
Tennyson House
Cambridge Business Park
Cambridge
CB4 0WZ

Dated: 28 January 2021

HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE

CHARITY No: 1154685

STATEMENT OF ASSETS
AS AT YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2020

	2020	2019
Cash funds		
Harlowsave Credit Union Account	33,076	9,156
Prepaid card	111	74
Petty cash	83	53
Subtotal	33,270	9,283
Other assets		
Legal Aid work in progress	14,307	8,829
Fixed assets	5,005	6,246
Financial settlements	8,344	5,610
Islington fees	-	979
Total	60,926	30,947
Liabilities		
Independent Examiner Fee	1,500	1,500
March Payroll	3,417	3,061
Big Issue Loan	13,210	21,180
Total	18,127	25,741

Notes to the accounts

These accounts have been prepared on a receipts and payments basis, and the accounts comply with Section 145 of the Charities Act 2011. The Trustees confirm, in accordance with the Charitable Incorporated Organisations (General) Regulations 2012, that at year end the CIO did not have any outstanding guarantees to third parties nor any debts secured on assets of the CIO.

I approve these accounts and confirm that I have made available all accounting records and information for their preparation.

M Barrett

Trustee

On behalf of the Committee

Dated:

28 Jan 2021

HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE
CHARITY No: 1154685

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2020

	Restricted	Unrestricted	2020 Total	2019 Total
Receipts				
Big Lottery Fund	104,657	-	104,657	100,624
Hertfordshire Action on Disability	-	-	-	738
Legal Aid	11,473	-	11,473	815
Big Issue	283	-	283	25,000
ATJF	-	-	-	10,000
ILC	2,797	-	2,797	6,758
Tudor Trust	75,000	-	75,000	-
Settlements	3,375	-	3,375	-
Miscellaneous	-	630	630	3,221
Total Receipts	**197,585**	**630**	**198,215**	**147,156**
Payments				
BLF recharge	20,377	-	20,377	22,183
Employee Costs	126,243	90	126,333	101,180
Training	841	-	841	1,580
Telephones	1,646	189	1,835	1,439
Payroll Costs	722	48	770	715
Equipment and Materials	333	-	333	349
Photocopying	501	-	501	243
Library and Information	348	-	348	448
Stationery	390	376	766	86
Travel and Subsistence	435	5	440	257
Miscellaneous	273	-	273	1,167
Insurance	2,721	202	2,923	2,188
Professional Body Membership	485	-	485	977
Postage	568	58	626	499
Ever level IT	1,506	95	1,601	-
Advice Pro IT	-	-	-	1,366
Rental to Library	1,424	191	1,615	345
Independent examination fee	1,914	-	1,914	1,500
SQM Audit Fee	-	-	-	1,260
Expert reports	2,324	-	2,324	259
Big Issue expenditure	9,486	-	9,486	5,115
ILC	397	40	437	798
Total Payments	**172,934**	**1,294**	**174,228**	**141,955**
Net of Receipts/(Payments)	**24,651**	**(664)**	**23,987**	**5,201**
Cash Funds From Previous Year	**8,330**	**953**	**9,283**	**4,082**
Cash Funds This Year End	**32,981**	**289**	**33,270**	**9,283**

HARLOW & WEST ESSEX LAW CENTRE
CHARITY No: 1154685

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2020

1. Statement of Funds Analysis

	Big Lottery Fund	Hertfordshire Action on Disability	Legal aid	ATJF	ILC	Tudor Trust	Settle-ments	Big Issue	Un-restricted	Total 2020	Total 2019
Opening Funds	(732)	(18)	(16,882)	7,039	(962)	-	-	19,885	953	9,283	4,082
Funds Received	104,657	-	11,473	-	2,797	75,000	3,375	283	630	198,215	147,156
Funds Expended	(88,162)	-	(17,330)	(7,034)	(1,835)	(57,253)	(1,320)	-	(1, 294)	(174,228)	(141,955)
Transfer of funds	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Closing Funds	15,763	(18)	(22,646)	5	-	17,747	2,055	20,075	289	33,270	9,283

2. Statement of Funds Analysis (prior year)

	Big Lottery Fund	Hertfordshire Action on Disability	Legal aid	ATJF	ILC	Big Issue	Un-restricted	Total 2019	Total 2018
Opening Funds	3,350	-	-	-	-	-	732	4,082	10,712
Funds Received	100,624	738	815	10,000	6,758	25,000	3,221	147,156	107,878
Funds Expended	(104,706)	(756)	(17,697)	(2,961)	(7,720)	(5,115)	(3,000)	(141,955)	(114,508)
Transfer of funds	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Closing Funds	(732)	(18)	(16,882)	7,039	(962)	19,885	953	9,283	4,082